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SUBJECT: PARLIAMENTARIANS CONCERNED AFTER TOUR OF SADR CITY

REF: BAGHDAD 1292

Classified By: Deputy PolCouns Ellen Germain for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)
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¶1. (C) Summary: Parliamentarians Ala Talabani and Zalwa al-Hashimi met with PolOff on April 28 to discuss their recent trip to Sadr City and the "humanitarian crisis" brewing there. Ala also noted the recent progress on the Civil Society Law, as well as some movement on the Political Parties Law. She concluded the meeting by expressing her concerns about the role of women in the elections process and the need for a strong Minister of State for Women's Issues.

Tour of Sadr City

¶2. (C) Ala Talabani (PUK) and Zalwa Abbas Hassan al-Hashimi (Fadhila) met with PolOff to discuss their recent tour of Sadr City hospitals and other service facilities. Characterizing the situation as a "humanitarian crisis", the two said that they would distribute to the Embassy and to PM Maliki a full report, including pictures, of what they observed during the tour with other parliamentarians, including Nawal Majid Hamid al-Samarae (IIP). They noted that the only women's hospital in Sadr City had been taken over by Coalition Forces (CF), preventing women in labor from having access to local medical facilities; compounding the problems was the fact that entry and egress from the area is strictly controlled by CF and women are having trouble getting to other women's hospitals around the city.

¶3. (C) Ala also repeated the story she mentioned to her uncle, President Jalal Talabani, cited in reftel. Her language muted in comparison to that account, she noted that she saw two children in a hospital who had been injured by military action, though she could not say which side she believed had caused the injuries; Zalwa was quick to point blame at CF. One of the children was riding his bicycle when he was shot in the arm; the bullet still in him, his family was unable to get him treatment away from Sadr City due to the restriction on movement. The other child had lost her leg completely from a shrapnel injury. Ala characterized both injuries as collateral damage caused by terrorists and militias bringing innocents into harm's way.

Civil Society Law

¶4. (C) Ala noted that the Civil Society Law, intended to replace CPA Order 45, was currently being considered by the Shura Council and the Council of Ministers and she predicted its arrival at the CoR next week for a first reading. She mentioned that there were only two differences in opinion between her and Acting Minister of State for Civil Society Wijdan Mikhael on the law: to whom the NGO Registration Office should report and what powers, if any, the Ministry of

State for Civil Society should have codified. On the former, Wijdan preferred that the Ministry of Planning resume authority over the office; Ala believed that it should remain where it is currently, under the Council of Ministers. On the latter, Wijdan commented to her that the current draft prematurely removes any mention of the State Ministry, in anticipation of its absence from Maliki's cabinet reshuffle. Ala was confident, nonetheless, that the law was too important in establishing the rights of NGOs to waste time worrying about government administration issues and thought that compromise was very likely. (Note: In a meeting the same day with Wijdan, she said that all references to both the role of the Ministry of State for Civil Society and who had authority over the NGO Registration Office had been removed from the draft law that was sent to the Shura Council; thus, the "politics of the law", in her words, will be decided later. End Note.)

15. (C) Ala also noted that once finished with the Civil Society Law, her committee would consider both an update to the Law on Unions and the Law of Political Parties. The latter was drafted by the office of PM Maliki, who distributed it to the CoR Legal, Defense, and Civil Society committees for comment. It has not been approved by the CoM, and there is little agreement on whether it should be part of the Elections Law, which Ala said seemed would likely happen, or a separate law, as implied by the Iraqi Constitution.

Ministry of Women and Elections

16. (C) Discussing the upcoming return of Tawafuq to the PM's cabinet, Ala noted that fellow parliamentarian Nawal Majid

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al-Samaraee (IIP) was being considered as the Minister of State for Women's Affairs (MoSWA), a Tawafuq Ministry under the initial cabinet that PM Maliki formed. She confided that many of the women parliamentarians felt this was a disappointment, since Nawal would likely be no stronger than the previous minister Fatin Abd al-Rahman Mahmud, who she called "close-minded" and operationally ineffective. Ala noted that she had never heard Nawal speak up once within the CoR sessions.

17. (C) Emphasizing the need for a strong Minister of State for Women's Affairs, she said that it might be possible to broker a deal granting the MoSWA to the Kurds in exchange for the Ministry of Environment going to Tawafuq. This would allow Acting Minister Narmeen Othman to fully accept the mantle, which would be a boon for women throughout Iraq, according to Ala.

18. (C) Whoever is the new Minister, Ala said, would have to issue a strong statement on the Elections Law provision concerning a quota for elected women. The lack of such a quota, Ala noted, was a concern for many of the women parliamentarians. Last week, a few women of the CoR, including Safia Souhail (Independent), Samirah Musawi (Independent), and Dr. Jenan Qasim al-Obeidi (ISCI), met with a UN expert on elections, to learn how an open list election system could still accommodate a quota. The women in attendance at this session were in agreement that the men of the CoR would likely eliminate any such quota if they could.
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